



Department Statement on Race- and Gender-related Fatal Attacks in the Atlanta Area March 20, 2021

The Department of Communication & Performance at ETSU condemns the acts of violence that targeted and tragically killed primarily Asian women in three Atlanta-area businesses just days ago. We understand these acts to be part of a much larger, and deeply disturbing, pattern pervading our country of anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination. We are gravely concerned about the threats to safety and resulting fear and trauma this racism produces in Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities nationwide. The Asian and AAPI student members of our department community are to be respected and safe, in such a way that they *feel* respected and safe; we want the same for all ETSU students, staff, and faculty.

As communication professionals, we know that language matters, that how we think and act are rooted in the words we speak and write. We know that “just joking” about racial/ethnic stereotypes, for example, never functions as *just* joking because it also supports racist thought and action and the resulting dangerous impacts of white supremacy. We know that whether COVID-19 is called the “novel coronavirus” or the “China virus” has profound impact on how Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander people are treated in our country. We know that when law enforcement officials use language that labels mass killings as grounded simply in the killer’s “bad day,” the racial elements of the attack—and the urgency of addressing the problem of racism—are obscured or erased. As ETSU Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, Dr. Keith Johnson, points out in his [March 19 statement](#), California State University’s [Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism](#) reported that hate crimes against Asian-American people surged nearly 150 percent in the larger US cities in 2020.

As communication professionals, we also know that the March 16 mass shootings are not exclusively about race; they also are about gender. Recognizing the ways race and gender intersect in these incidents is of critical importance. Seven of the eight people killed were women. [News reports](#) indicate that the White man, who was charged with murder, targeted these women because of a sexual temptation he claimed he could not control. Echoing our statement above, we understand these acts to be part of a much larger, and deeply disturbing, pattern pervading our country of not only sexist and misogynist sentiment and discrimination, but also of women being held responsible, punished, and even killed for the thoughts and behaviors of men, particularly as they relate to sexuality. The student, staff, and faculty women of our department community are to be respected and safe, in such a way that they *feel* respected and safe.

The faculty and staff of the Department of Communication and Performance uphold our [mission and values](#) as we consider the assaults on Asian and AAPI communities, and denounce race- and gender-related prejudice, hate, and violence. We will continue to “promote civic engagement, social responsibility, and civil dialogue in local, national, and global arenas.” We will

continue to teach and embody inclusiveness “that fosters respectful, ethical engagements and dialogues across populations and communities, and that advocates for free and open exchange of ideas, sustained democratic values, and working for the public good.” Because the words we speak and write matter, we want to—and encourage others to—*say the names* of the people who died as a result of this week’s attacks: Xiaojie “Emily” Tan, Daoyou Feng, Soon C. Park, Suncha Kim, Yong Yue, Hyun Jung Grant, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Paul Andre Michels.

We encourage members of the ETSU community who have been impacted by these incidents to consult the resources provided in [Dr. Johnson’s statement](#).